"A Forest in Full Bloom" by Mishima Yukio

TRANSLATED BY CHRISTOPHER MICHAEL RICH

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The serialization of "Hanazakari no mori" in the Gakushūin (Peer's School) literary journal *Bungei bunka* (Literary Culture) during the autumn and early winter of 1941 marks the beginning of Hiraoka Kimitake's persona as a writer and his adoption of the pen name, Mishima Yukio (1925–70). Although a successful work, selling out its first printing of the four thousand copies published by Nanadake Shoin in one week in 1944, wartime shortages of paper and then the post-war rise of leftist ideology and the concurrent wave of antipathy towards classical and decadent literature[1] consigned the story to orphanhood until 1971, when it was published posthumously in a silver-foil-bound boxed collection of Mishima's novellas and short stories. Mishima himself called it "miraculous" that such a "frivolous" book had been published during the war, stating that perhaps it had been published only because "it was at least not leftist." Indeed, Mishima later disowned the work calling it a "Rilkean novel in which one notices only the evil influence of the romantics and a precocious pomposity."[2]

While "Hanazakari no mori" contains a strong admixture of Mishima's confused and juvenile longings and desires, a cursory glance at his later fiction reveals that he did not abandon the metaphors and allusions he created in this early work to figure a persona filled with contradictory and unfulfillable desires. Almost thirty years after its initial publication, Mishima wrote in a postscript to the collection of short stories and novellas including "Hanazakari no mori":

> When I, their author, reread them—I am overwhelmed with embarrassment as if rereading love letters written in my youth. Yet it is because they are love letters that they were written with all my strength and spirit. But not only this—they are also accompanied by the selfishness and cunning of a

person who writes at such an age, written with care so as not to reveal too much passion. Pure passion it is, but pure passion combined with powerlessness, regrettable attachment, dreams, mistaken self-consciousness. Now in my middle age can I at last relax and recognize the beauty present in them.

Even so, to whom could it have been that these love letters were written? To beauty? To that gentle and kind goddess of beauty who eternally indulges my own delicate, poetic sensitivity? Now when I think of to whom it was that I wrote these love letters, her true form at last becomes visible. They were written to words. All of these are violently passionate love letters to "words."

How happy might I be if I had died in the war and left behind only these works. Fate did not lead me in such a manner, but if I had died at such a time, this collection of works, even if it had never gained many readers, would be loved and able to eke out a precarious existence like the dream of a minor romanticist who had died in his twenties.[3]

She died in the forest at the height of its flowering,
She knew there were greener forests elsewhere.

Charles Cros

A FOREST IN FULL BLOOM

Prelude

Since coming to this land, I have come to see dimly in my feelings a strangely aged mind that one would be inclined to call reclusive. Although this land is merely a piece of property with no connection to me nor to my ancestors, it is not inconceivable that someday it might bear a profound relationship to me and my descendants. Absorbed in such feelings when I climbed the narrow mossy steps behind our home and stood upon a patch of grass growing on a level clearing made for no other purpose but looking at the view, accompanying my usual feeling of quiet emptiness, I experienced a burning nostalgia for the place whence I had come. From where I stood I could see at a glance the bay pressing in upon the mountain range which embraced the town directly below. Morning and night, the steamships linking great capitals departed from the docks on the outskirts of town and even from where I stood the sound of their steam whistles could be heard with irritating clarity. At night, ships the size of thimbles ablaze with lights, rushed out to sea. These small lights, glowing like tips of incense, tantalized me with their slow movement.

Until just one or two years ago, I had often reflected on the vanity of indulging in memory. A certain prejudice caused me to wonder . . .

Are memories anything more than the empty husks remaining from one's past, which even were they to bear fruit on some future occasion, would not merely serve a weakened person already bereft of the present? Fevered youth is inclined to recklessly affirm this way of thinking. But after the passage of some time, my thoughts effortlessly moved in another direction. Memory provides the purest proof of the present. Without memory, one cannot possess nor comprehend the true meaning of emotions such as love and devotion, which are too pure to exist in present reality. Memory reflects the blue sky for the first time, like a spring discovered after clearing away the fallen leaves. Because although they are scattered over the spring, the leaves can never reflect the sky. . . .

We truly have multitudes of ancestors. Sometimes they dwell within us just like beautiful desires, but frequently they stand, provocatively, a stern distance apart.

Often our ancestors happen upon us in strange ways. People may doubt this. But it is true.

On days when shafts of sunlight penetrate beautifully through the trees, we might pick up our walking stick and approach the park fence. When we enter the gate, perhaps because of this particularly quiet hour, we sense an incomparable fondness for the broad open space, absent of any human activity. Even though we are not in the habit of using a walking stick, this stick, which today we took along for no conscious reason, will for an instant cause us to remember a feeling we had in the distant past, when at last we were allowed to touch for one or two seconds the family heirloom—an old war helmet. Such a time as this.

On a bench far across the pond (perhaps glaring in the light from the reflection of the pond or in the sunlight streaming through the trees), someone rests, sitting formally and without moving. Then, suddenly, the person faces us. For no apparent reason he vigorously stands up and without quite breaking into a run, weaves toward us through the sun-dappled trees. Although we observe him with an almost childish enthusiasm, as if he were a figure in a painting we knew, before long this familiar person abruptly melts into the sunlight and shadows amongst the trees, like a fish dissolving into the blueness of deeper water. Yet I'm afraid that, from this confession of mine, people will imagine this person to be a generous old man wearing a crested kimono and formal trousers. Indeed, this image may be correct. But one can also say that such a situation would be exceedingly rare. Why? Because, "this person," on occasion, might be a young man wearing a suit, or a young girl. Still, one must not imagine too much. These

"people" all maintain quiet, inconspicuous, and neat appearances as if they had already agreed upon it beforehand. As if within us there were a magnet to attract such smiles alone, their smiles come to us from an extremely great distance. Those smiles, although pitiless, reveal a devotion akin to longing. . . .

How far in the past was it that our ancestors truly dwelled within us? Nowadays, because our hearts are fenced off by so many different things, our ancestors cannot find a place to dwell there. Sadly, restlessly, they circle our hearts like the hands of a clock. They had not even dreamed of this age in which the severe and the beautiful were rent asunder. Now, in their hearts, they mourn this parting which resembles the day the earth first split from heaven. Now severity merely possesses the character of rough, scattered boulders. Beauty, however, is a valiant and gorgeous galloping horse. Previously, that horse was held firmly under control as it faced the mist-soaked morning sky boldly neighing. Only at that time was it innocent and incomparably gentle. But now, severity has released its reins. The horse stumbles countless times, and just as many times struggling to stand up, it gallops off. No longer is it innocent. Filth stains its coat. However, on rare occasions, some people still see the illusion of a flawlessly white horse. Our ancestors are searching for such a person. Perhaps these ancestors will slowly come to dwell in him. Here will their exquisitely noble coexistence begin.

Our ancestors will dwell next to truth within this person. Then truth, which in this blindingly dizzying world has never been more than a dialectical method, shall recloak itself in its real clothes. That which had been indolent and shy will regain a daring resolve. Our ancestors, unmoving, await the nurturing of this new truth. How our ancestors wish to be nurtured on such gentle sustenance! They do not represent action. On the contrary, their passive composure never decays. Just as the glow of sunset foreshadows the invasion of night, the end of something occurs in a moment of eternal time, a beautiful instant of tension, like extremely still water, which at the height of tension and fear flickeringly maintains itself just as it is, resisting the slightest flaw—straining to maintain "perfection," if for only one second.

Part One

In the house where the child was born, the whistle of the steam locomotive often echoed late at night. To the ears of a child unable to sleep, and frightened by the whorls and knots in the boards of the ceiling, the sound was too weak to be called a cacophony—it was a sound of some gentle splendor yet unknown. Just like an evening when

one unexpectedly hears the distant din of the capital, the child heard the body of autumn fog rolling in like a white beast through the back gate. It spread everywhere, like fireworks soundlessly exploding. Through the thin mist, the autumn grass was covered in desolate whiteness like the white upon white pattern of a hemp summer *futon.*

A child sleeping alone tried desperately to push his way in through the cracks amongst his dreams. Then real sounds took the form of dreams. The steam whistle seemed to be an autumn tempest making the sound of a flute as it fled through a field of flowers. In an instant the child imagined—the snow beginning to fall about a small station in the north—a train leaving the station carrying stacked boxes of green apples and salmon brought from a distant ocean (a stove squats between the passenger seats, seated in the train is a young woman wrapped in a muffler, or an old man wearing ear muffs and an otter-pelt cap)—the spectacle of this heartless train willfully forcing its way forward, not glancing even in pity at a village of early blooming camellia or a run-down factory town, few of its chimneys emitting smoke. And then, he could see beyond a picket of charred posts, from the mist upon a part of the tracks shining faintly white, a gigantic locomotive shaking with asthmatic spasms as it begins to depart. This fog bore the fragrance of burning incense. . . .

Whenever the father took the child to town he would wait beside the fence which stood next to the tracks so that the child could watch the train. Beyond the tracks, the myriad of neon signs shone like the remainder of the sunset's red glow, resembling wayward stars wheeling about in the black backdrop.

Just as a native of a southern land will cheer when an elephant passes by, the child jumped about laughing and clapping wildly in his father's arms as the trains curtly arrived and departed.

During this time the child often saw dreams about trains. The structure of the house was large, with a wide tile floor, massive iron gate, and brick wall. Before the gate stretched a narrow, blackish street. In the dream, the train passed over this street. A bright main street like that in the capital of an earlier age in some unknown place (overflowing with light that seemed to have been splashed about by the bucketful) from which a train carrying neither passengers nor driver bore headlong down the black alleyway. The child distinctly heard the rails screeching like an invalid grinding his teeth in anguish. Darkness expanded like a tent, while about the train, its windows vainly lit up with bright lights, flickered red and green stars like the colored sparks given off by those tin toys when spun round and round. The old city trolley looked just like a toy train as it ran before the gate

(passing through this tiny lane too narrow for there to be any use for a trolley) creating a wonderful echo . . . the child strained his ears to listen. But it could no longer be heard. The night train's steam whistle sounded even further off in the distance. But this trolley which passed by with such magnificent force just a moment before, descending the hill to the left of the house like a young falling star, had by now in reaction abruptly turned the corner where stood a fire tower, its walls of oiled paper glowing yellow in the night. The child woke up. The second hand of the pendulum clock sounded like murmuring waves. After a time, the objects in the room appeared unfamiliar and precious. The clock chimed. The child's attention, fixated on the sound, returned to his dream.

No one standing before this tall iron gate could imagine the lives being led behind these walls without feeling violently repulsed. The iron gate, cast in a flowery Chinese design, looked out on nothing more than a perfectly arranged front garden and a front entrance which reminded one of nothing other than a temple roof tile cast in the shape of a demon. The heavy beam which hung over the entrance engaged whomever stood at the gate in its haughty and fatalistic struggle. A brick wall blocked one's view of all the inner parts of the manor, the fragrance of the flowers, even the shrill voices of the people laughing were absorbed by its dampness.

The father could not usually be seen in the main room of the manor; he had a small room built beside the spacious, three-ridged hothouse. Like an expanse of open sea between the main room and the tiny cottage stretched flower gardens, plots of vegetables, pear orchards, and grapevines. When summer arrived bees swarmed in clouds above the vineyard. Even if one approached very near, a bee would remain still, resting upon a large grape leaf. I watched dazzling summer clouds rise from the far end of the garden, which cast a light making the bees' hair and wings glisten like sharp golden needles, seeing in their huge golden eyes lovely summer clouds that swelled and drifted off.

My grandmother and mother lived in the main room of the manor. My mother and father's maintaining separate living quarters seemed strange even to my immature mind, but at night when my grandmother, fatigued from pain, would finally slip into sleep, and I was breathing deeply in slumber (actually peering out from time to time searching for my mother's form), I would see my mother slip on a pair of garden clogs and hurry to my father's room, dragging her shadow which was cast across the bright, moonlit orchards and gardens to where I slept. Not only did I feel joy and pleasure as I gazed upon my unsuspecting mother's departing figure, but also a certain

pride in forcing myself not to call out to her. My grandmother suffered from a disease of the nervous system and constantly lapsed into spasms. As if she were possessed, those nearly impossible-to-quiet spasms would begin. When her deep groans could begin to be heard, the spasms overflowed in invisible waves over the small objects in her sickroom, the ashtray, the medicine cabinet, the censer. In an instant the room was gripped by paralytic tension, which rapidly cleared like mountain mist, and then the entire room—the censer, the bamboo rice basket, the medicine bottle—brimmed over with the unwavering note of her deep and agonized moaning. I'm afraid that others cannot imagine the room itself, filled with groans and howls. However, when the spasms continued for the whole day, sometimes even for many nights on end, an even clearer omen appeared. "Sickness" had spread its face throughout our home and taken it over.

"Child, won't you pour me some medicine?" My grandmother spoke, her voice still groggy from sleep. This was a voice which came only from an aged throat, gentle, like the scratchy writing made by an uneven pen, almost nostalgic in its pronunciation. But because she then tried to move into a position she could not bear, afterwards her groans would continue. My grandmother always drank her medicine from a stemmed wine glass. I would sit down properly with my knees folded and then, feeling slightly nervous because of the importance of the task, open the bottle of medicine. I still remember in the instant of liberation from its bondage the oddly demented and dry sound the cork stopper made as it was released from its duty. I tipped the bottle filled with the thick, wine-colored medicine and carefully brought it to the edge of the glass. Because I knew from previous experience that the glass held only an extremely small volume of fluid, I should have been able to perform this leisurely motion almost unconsciously—I can remember even now the strange awkwardness I felt at the time. The fluid would not yet emerge, almost as if it were an obstruction of all the same color. I looked at the bottle through the sunlight and gently shook it. The bottle contained nothing. I tilted it once more. As before, nothing came out. Suddenly I realized that when my wrist came to a certain sharp, fixed angle, it would mechanically stiffen, just like a broken door hinge that won't open any further. I know that this was superstitious on my part. I think it absurd. But then my pulse began to race uncontrollably. My hand trembled dangerously, to the point where I could no longer tilt the bottle. Just then, I clearly saw it within the bottle—"sickness." He was grotesquely stunted and slept with his chin resting on his drawn-up knees as if he were completely unaware of the ocean of medicine washing his own body.

I entered the old quarters at the edge of the main hall to peek at the iron helmets, armor, and long swords in scabbards which looked like a man's hairy shins. As I was returning from these rooms, the maid left me alone in the hall which led to the kitchen, saying, "You won't be frightened past here" as she was already walking off. Actually, "here" is where it became the most terrifying. But I felt too ashamed to tell her that and usually just glared after her with an expression devoid of any entreaty. Even then the maid did not so much as even glance in my direction. Three or four more rooms until my grandmother's room. One long hallway. Three more corners to turn—shaking in fear, I ran as if carried along in the sunlit breeze that poured down the dark corridor most afternoons. At every corner I encountered (at least one) "sickness." It too would be running in fright. He stood much taller than me. Sometimes he had a face, sometimes he did not. The one with a face—was innocently laughing. He was definitely still "sickness," but not yet intimate with "death." But he was certainly on his way to hearing about a "sickness" on more intimate terms with "death." One day, my right pinky barely brushed against that wet, invisible being. That day whenever I had a moment, I washed the finger. After washing it so often, my fingertip became painfully swollen, and my fingerprint to which I had never before given much thought, appeared strangely clean and distinct. My fingerprint reminded me of the knots in the ceiling boards of the room which kept me from falling asleep or of primitively written Chinese characters customarily used to represent the words "sick-ness."

My mother was by nature a hard woman. She never sought to reflect on what she did or said—just as a honeybee never retraces the same route. But the honeybee never mistakes its way back to the hive. But my mother, to an extent that others thought her foolish, often did. For this reason my mother could not be said to possess memory in its true meaning. For her thoughts to retrace the stream to her past too many explanations remained necessary—she probably lacked none of the qualities for being a mother. However, she was also a woman of "her generation." Nor did she hear in the sad separation between beauty and severity the choking dirge being played for her departed parents.

To mother, I was a precious but useless thing, a never withering artificial leaf made to look fresh—who overflowed with unpromising desires in the midst of decay—thus she understood me more or less in terms of certain Americanized stereotypes. No matter which path I took, without question it would be one of decay. But this path too greatly resembled the more resilient and lively facade of flourishing

glory. She did not know how to reveal the true pride which existed abundantly within her. She had already plucked out her aristocratic eyes. Thus she toyed with wearing the borrowed glasses of the bourgeoisie. But no matter what, these glasses were still borrowed. The only way she could comprehend exposing her true pride was expressed by the word "vanity." Vanity—until only recently such a vulgar word did not exist in Japan. I think it must be an Americanism. At any rate, thereafter my mother saw in everything the phantom of vanity. This phantom obliterated the most noble object in the most vile, hateful, and cruel manner. My mother did not regard vanity severely; but until the end she frowned upon vanity's gleanings. Vanity in and of itself employs only a self-indulgent eye. Nonetheless such selfishness faced all the stern glances of the aristocracy with ease.

"People may think I'm only doing what is correct or what is expected, but I really don't care what people think of what I do." My mother had a habit of saying things like this, but why would true pride adopt such a pose? When had such exhibitionism and arbitrariness become so "correct." It goes without saying that it began on that day of parting—the day of the dirge. True pride used not to be so courageous and strong. It was timid as young bamboo-grass. People might criticize such lack of confidence and certitude. Yet when something extremely noble comes from that which is extremely strong, something is born which is as tiny and gorgeous as anything in this world. But no one is saying that impurities such as certitude and confidence exist there.

My mother defeated my father.

My father (he devoted his life to the improvement of various types of plants and the tending of rare botanicals, and organized various cooperatives for people of leisure) never felt any dissatisfaction nor anger with my mother. This was because he had been defeated.

One day in autumn, my father appeared to me in the following way. Attended by several gardeners, he stood in the middle of a pale indigo field cast in yellow, gazing up at the sky. My father's figure was slender, even weak, but like pure rich wine, he appeared beneath the autumn sunlight like an ancient statue of the Buddha from the Asuka period. Then I barely glimpsed our serene family crest filling the beautiful autumn sky like a purple drape.

Part 2

I know the place where my longing exists. Longing resembles a river. No one part of the river can actually be the river. Why? Because rivers flow. That which was the river yesterday, is not the river

today. Yet eternally the river exists. A person can beckon it. But he cannot talk about it. My longing resembles this. Then so does that of my ancestors. You may think it strange, but my ancestors are counted from among the military and court nobility. When we travel to their native places, a beautiful river appears and disappears alongside the train. As if with unsurpassable elegance it were protecting our journey. Ah, this river. This I understand—the silent oath passed down to me by my ancestors. That longing would in certain places be hidden, and in certain places conceal itself, but dying it was not. Like an ancient hedge of roses which has been rejuvenated, a river flowed underground through my grandmother and mother. In my father, it became a trickling brook. In me—if it was not a great, flooding river, then it was a tapestry, a celebratory song of the gods.

After my grandmother died, several volumes of Lady Hiroaki's diary and an old family bible were found in a weathered Chinese trunk. The bible was encased in a box inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and covered in brocade. The diary was altogether five volumes, its end papers decorated with pine trees and sprinkled with silver dust. On the title page some priest had inscribed two or three lines of scripture. The priest was a man born in Spain and brought up in a southern colony. I couldn't even guess at the meaning of those foreign words. But I couldn't help but feel that their pronunciation contained a transparent echo like two panes of old-fashioned "vidrio" sliding together.

The lady is one of our distant ancestors. She and her husband were faithful disciples of their lord. Her husband's castle stood near a bay in a southern land—as does the lonely run-down place in which I am now living.

The dates in her diaries are not certain. May suddenly jumps to August. The "sixteenth," written just after August tenth, may have been the sixteenth of November, and such. It goes without saying that some entries were not dated. This was because she enjoyed no respite from nursing her sickly husband. Also, the multi-hued air of onion-shoot green, coppery gold, and ash which wafts through every castle never failed to destroy her moments of leisure.

Her diary on some summer day contained a passage which described something as follows.

That afternoon when she had a few hours to herself, her husband was peacefully sleeping. Everything within the quiet sickroom was drowsing, Hanshan and Shide painted on the screen, the plain and inlaid lacquer objects, the fresh, clean borders of the tatami, even the "sickness" beside the lord's sitting cushion, dazedly watching over

him. . . . During such a brief interlude madame would be released from her painful and unbearably sad nursing duty. She would order some servants to remain by his side and pass through the dark, chilly hallway. A light which came from above would faintly illuminate one part of the hall. Her footfalls eliciting cold squeaks from the boards, she climbed the stairs whence, as she looked above her, she could see bright light as if spilling from heaven.

When she approached the railing of the turret she could see for the first time the warmth and transformation the season had wrought. The glaring sun brilliantly illuminated the walls and posts, covered with dust from long disuse, to the extent that even objects such as this appeared to have been imparted with a fresh and new aspect. Far below, the castle gate was barely visible, and the town perched on a gently inclining hill, its rows of low, overlapping black rooftops descended this slope to the sea like a mass of flotsam overflowing the narrow street in a mad rush to the sea. Some rooftops glittered like lacquer boxes in the harsh sun, dark forests of pine stretched out beyond the outskirts of the town. Further out could be seen the dull, calm ocean. Heavy clouds hung over the sea obscuring the horizon. Just where the horizon disappeared from view, nimbi gathered in layers like wet sandy soil. Then, perhaps it was just her imagination, but madame thought she heard peals of distant thunder. The idea that those rain clouds reflected her feelings of depression and melancholy, and the fear that her sadness too would spread with the widening nimbostratus may have been what forced her to look away from this scene. She left the railing and stepped towards the railing on the opposite side. Because the castle stood over a wide mountain valley, the railing faced a gentle mountain. The peaks directly in front of the castle were further off, but on the right rose a hill-like mountain with a gentle slope pressing in upon the castle like a parent hovering over a child.

Whitewashed and thatched walls prominently surrounded the castle in countless layers. Trees erupted in a riot of green foliage while the murmuring voices of the cicadas reverberated from among the leafy cherries. The mountain's green face displayed a delicate harmony between somber hues and dazzling leaves. Wind appeared to be gusting about the mountain peak, violently dispelling the light amongst the trees. Even the grasses and tree trunks glistened brightly in an almost treeless, shelf-like area set midslope into the mountain. Scattered amongst the shining grasses could be seen something pure and white that appeared to be lilies. A mildly intoxicating breeze blew. Everything shining brightly remained motionless like a moment of

heaven. The atmosphere was so clear that she felt she might be able to reach out her hand and touch the mountains, smoky in the unknowable distance, or even the faint, blue sea. An incomprehensible feeling of pride, as if she could touch everything, rose in a pale blaze amidst the silence. There is no doubt that at this moment, a clear and bright glow of happiness colored madame's emaciated, faintly white face. Her right hand, plump like a silk pillow, may have quietly touched the patinaed silver crucifix hanging at her breast. This motion may have given her a surreal pleasure.

She revived her memories. That day in spring last year when her husband was still healthy and she walked as far as that hollow on the mountainside to pluck shoots with her serving girls. The young grasses had just begun to bud; the thin, delicate veins on the leaves of the grasses which had risen up incomparably soft and gentle. That day, when plucking and picking the young plants, they came to the area below the hollow where flowed a cascade, too small and slender to be called a waterfall, while in the hollow above could be seen gorgeously blooming flowers. Then, even though it was certain that a gushing spring overflowed there, the perilousness of their path caused them, contrary to their original intention, to turn back. This memory grew even stronger, forcing her to gaze upon that hollow. The hollow had become just like an alcove recessed in a wall to hold a holy image.

When in her unconscious had such a frozen gaze come to include such a forlorn hope? Were it a desire unknown even to the woman herself, a pure, easily perishable wish is not weak. One cannot say that such hopes do not have the power to move the will of the gods. Hope flies off towards its destination with a beautiful beating of wings to prepare a miracle that it has made possible.

It was such a time as this. Madame watched something pure white glistening brightly amongst the pure white clump of lilies in the hollow. It appeared to be the trunk of a tree, but wavered supplely. When she fixed her gaze upon it, the effect of her hope made her think that it gradually approached her. The summer sun shone unwaveringly. Everything glittered warmly and brightly from the green ravines where cicadas buzzed as though suffering in the close heat, to the tops of the densely forested hills. She went to look closer, blinking as she watched that shining object. Although hazy, it appeared to be a woman with long, glossy hair. She seemed to be wearing a long-hemmed, white kimono. Slightly apart from that dazzling whiteness but identically white appeared a patch of light—could it be a single lily that she held in her hand? Captivated by the figure of this aristocratically dressed woman who would have appeared strange even

in the capital, much less in this out-of-the-way land, madame could not comprehend what it was that seemed odd about the woman's costume, something which, look as she did, remained invisible to her.

She felt suspicious. The woman looked like someone she had never seen before, and yet like someone familiar—she could not help but feel that she resembled an image she had once seen. Of course she could not be certain of the face. But only because it was suffused with a glowing light.

For a moment, because of the way the light shone, she glanced upon something on the woman's breast that glittered more piercingly than anything else. Madame was struck with a sudden realization. In the next instant, madame thought the woman's face spread into a smile, gazing upon her with a singular expression.

Madame felt giddy. In the next instant, she no longer saw anything above the hollow. Regret throbbed like pain and then quietly dispersed in her heart. "Ah, it is a crucifix. That which glows on the Holy Mother's breast is a crucifix." Madame lightly touched the cross which lay upon her own breast. She saw the deluge of sunlight scattered about her. And then she imagined herself reflected in the eyes of this woman who had looked down upon her from that place. Then her own figure converged with that of the lady's. She trembled at her heart's extravagance. She wanted to fall upon her knees. But something kept her from yet having to do so. Everything seemed like a dream. Now neither the glory of heaven nor the joy of a good "conscience" remained in her breast. Emotion embraced her entirely. The emotion itself contained neither exultation nor despair. It was something closer to vital force itself. She thought that it was frightening that people could see everything to such a degree in the glimmering of an instant. But it was also thankful and beautiful, seeing everything and understanding nothing in that very instant. Very gradually, that which was brewing in her heart might at last dye the surface of what she had seen with meaning. But madame feared—what if that meaning turned out to be something that distanced itself from the true meaning of this experience? She gradually came to regret that she had been so intent on looking during that moment. "Oh, if only from the start I had shut my eyes and knelt down to pray!"—even though in that moment the experience's true meaning may have illuminated her entire being with this unblemished figure of the lady. Joy again replaced regret. When such a replacement occurred like a sail pregnant with wind her body swelled with various thoughts—joy, regret, memories. At last madame knelt down. Her prayers swept off in every direction like doves. Prayer must be nothing other than the revelation of

vital force. She was no longer merely human. She had become her own vital power. When her body had begun to feel light after long prayer, like a child on the verge of awakening, she looked about her in fear. By then those rain clouds had already rapidly concealed the top of the turret. She gazed dazedly upon a scene that everywhere she looked was gradually being dyed the color of thin, black ink. Since she thought she heard the snatch of a song near her ear, she looked around, and there a bee was buzzing listlessly. For the first time she realized that hanging from the far eaves was a huge bee hive with several bees swarming about it, the smoky sea falling away in the background . . . .

Madame's brush dances in this day's passage in her diary. Several lines are even strangely jumbled together. Although on other days her entries looked orderly, with lines even dispassionately following one after the other, on this one day it seemed that her words were no longer her own. Only on this day . . . as if the "small flower" on that page had blossomed and scattered.

She seemed to have told only the priest about this miracle. The priest did not use her experience as a means for evangelism. Thus he seems truly to have been both an uncommon and highly virtuous person.

What after all had madame seen? For a long while this question occupied my thoughts. I thought perhaps that it was a beautiful means which had been grasped only in desperation. Longing had been maturing unceasingly within madame. Her ancestors had planted this seed of longing for something almost unattainable. It became a tender leaf, and never stopped growing. Why? Because madame possessed an extremely gentle and noble heart. One step before the "Holy Mother's" visitation, the leaves were yet tender buds overflowing with life in anticipation of their unfolding.

Blossoming flowers celebrate the birthday of life. When the lotus bloomed, fish were sleeping in ponds laid thick with mist and green winged insects rested stilly upon the wide round leaves. Perhaps no one heard the sound of the lotus bloom. But the sound supporting the blossom's swaying reflection reverberated like a bell across countless mountains, rivers, and villages. Perhaps people mistook it for the sound of the wingbeats of the chickens in the coop. Or the birth cries made the instant a new life departs the womb and peers out into the blue sky for the first time. For their whole lives people believed the sound to be the cry of a child being born, and the growing child the only proof of this. The child's father, or perhaps his grandfather—those who have heard that sound will in their dying moments

perhaps for the first time understand the real meaning of life. It is then that people will hear again the blossoming lotus' sound echoing across the countless mountains and rivers.

Supported by the strength of the blossoming flower, madame ascended the high tower. The flowers' blossoming had been prepared for this purpose.

In other words, this blossomed longing had been struck directly by that very holy vision. If it had not been struck, the lady would eternally not appear, and accordingly, for eternity never disappear. Of some indistinct and unidentifiable color the vision would have remained forever stored up within the madame. It was for this reason that the lady's smile contained something strange, something inescapable. Danger frequently brings such enigmatic smiles to people's lips. The lady of the vision approached with purposeful rapidity. This was because she was trying to avoid an inescapable abyss. But in the flickering of an instant she had disappeared. No!—this danger may have been brought about by Madame Hiroaki herself. Madame, like the high monk in the distant past who had seen the true aspect of hell, may have clearly seen the boundary between heaven and earth. Because one's vital force rarely risks this kind of danger, about half a year later she returned to the peaceful repose of the gods.

Part 3, the first

Sal trees in constant bloom forebode the decline of the Heian court. Even the commoners heard the disturbing rumors issuing from the summer retreats of the aristocracy. This tale was created during such an age. It was written down and presented to a distant ancestor of mine of certain distinguished rank directly serving the throne. Even now the first scroll is hidden deep in our family storehouse. When I untie the string that binds it, I sense an extreme similarity between the writer's passion, rare in the world in which she lived, and a certain particularity of my ancestry. Doesn't the book's having dwelled for so many years together with my clan mean that it shares an inseparable bond with my ancestry? The author of this story never attained a particularly high rank in court. Never, in the end, did she share any connection with my family line. She did, however, carry on a private relationship with the above-mentioned ancestor, to the extent that one summer he visited her secretly night after night. This tale begins with her memories of this time. She rose up in flames, he became cool. But the ties of their love just managed to remain uncut. The woman had once served in the palace—her position there does not seem to have been too important—but working there cast a shadow of courtly grace upon her

manners and speech. In addition to her gentle elegance and her growing efforts at the tasteful appointment of her living quarters and gorgeously decorated bedchamber as the man continued visiting her night after night, the well-timed reticence of a palace lady served well in quelling the man's irritability.

But this woman maintained a correspondence with a man who had been one of her childhood playmates. At some time he had taken the tonsure and gone to a mountain temple near the capital to devote himself to prayer. Although his smoldering agony and confusion became more and more difficult to suppress, he constantly wrote her letters, not tiring of the inutterably countless ways he had to devise to send them to her. With the coming of autumn's penetrating cold, her courtier's lack of sympathy led the woman to gradually turn her heart toward her old childhood friend who was now a monk.

Probably what motivated this change of heart was some degree of bitterness and desire to get back at the man from the palace. But her pride would not allow her to show any affection towards this man whom she had neglected for so long. The truth was that she obsessively feared what would happen should she lose them both. Such complex feelings bequeathed her with the stereotypical confusion and torment of an aristocratic woman of ancient times.

The story thus begins narrating such events and ends with the chapter I am about to relate. Although this tale was delivered by a messenger from the cloister where she later dwelled, this woman's feelings, who compiled a declaration of her own conduct in story form and as a means of confession or apology had it presented it to this nobleman already on the verge of having forgotten her, cannot be laughingly dismissed as merely the passion which court women of her day held for literature.

"A moonlit night . . ." she wrote with a clarity inappropriate for describing such recklessness. The woman waited fretfully by the root of a tree on a small mountain near the temple. She could hear the ceaseless bubbling of a spring around her. Pure water poured forth vigorously. Spray fine as dust scattered over the summer clover like fireworks of water. The woman looked with pity at the glowing fireflies resting on the leaf tips of the flourishing bushes. One couldn't imagine that they were "charring their bodies."[4] Humbly guarding within their own bodies the lamps forcibly lit from the outside . . . she felt a glimmer of understanding of their submissive and gentle lives. Without the least bit of knowledge that at some time her own fate would come to resemble these lives. . . .

At last the shadow of a person crouching near a massive pine slid away conspicuously. Lowering his voice, the man carefully scrutinized his surroundings and tremblingly approached her. If, rather, he had fixed her with a braggartly, unfeeling stare, she would have seen the face of an impossibly arrogant man. But because he faced a gravely uncertain future as a runaway monk who had broken his vows, the man's panic was not without reason.

As the two traveled along the pebbled shore of the river, they distanced themselves further and further from the capital. Dew dripped heavily from a clump of summer grasses, firefly-grass and bluegrass, which flourished along the river banks. A firefly barely visible on a blade of grass was lost among the stars as it flew further and further away. The man spoke. . . . We will visit a sympathetic distant uncle where we can spend some time preparing ourselves to then make off to my hometown in Kii. The woman bowed her head in agreement. After all, the woman felt that it was up to him to do as he saw fit. But because she now was dependent on this one man, she could do nothing but bite her lips in response.

The sound of the current grew louder as they proceeded upriver. The woman became more and more compliant. In contrast to a few moments before, the man plucked up his courage, while the woman's spirit went limp.

"What a terrifying sound!"

"Don't worry, the ocean is nothing like it. . . ." The man fell silent after answering.

By the time they departed his uncle's home and were headed straight for Kii, their respective situations had changed completely from when they were in the capital. As if she had completely forgotten her cold replies to his repeated missives, the woman yielded and entrusted herself to the man from the bottom of her heart.

"The ocean? What might the ocean be? In my whole life, I have never seen such a terrible thing."

"Isn't the ocean just the ocean?" The man laughed.

When the man arrived in his village on the Kii shore, their surroundings were dyed entirely with the colors of autumn. For three days following their arrival at night in the village, the woman, panic-stricken by the sound of the waves, cowered in her room, refusing even to open the doors separating the ocean from herself.

On the morning of the fourth day, the woman made up her mind. So as not to be seen in her terror-wrought disarray, she set out alone for the shore while her husband was away. Stepping out from

the house, the ocean glittered like a fine satin cord. The violent crashing of the waves rumbled to the soles of her feet. Covering her face, she ran headlong towards the shore. The wind gusting off the waves buffeted her ears while the sound of the roaring surf rose unremittingly. When she felt the dry, warm sand beneath the soles of her feet, her whole body delicately trembled. Then she took her hands from her face.

The view of the great sea expanded as if it were the only thing that properly belonged there. The sky was brilliantly clear, clouds sparkling with gold floated up like the gilded paintings in illuminated scrolls. Still the long peninsula, speckled with light green, embraced her right side like an elegantly supple torso. For the first time the image of the whale-hunted sea was seared into her breast. Just as it is rare for pain to immediately accompany a grievous injury, in that flickering moment she discovered something completely different from the terror she had expected to feel. The inlet sea already swelled within her at the moment when her breast was struck with this discovery. The woman had fallen into a rapture—a trance akin to the mysterious rapture experienced when, already one footfall away from death, one realizes that one is about to be killed. Although this gave her a premonition, its meaning had nothing to do with the present. This present was beautiful and forlorn, a pure moment cut off from the rest of the world. Here she was able to adopt this incomparably passive posture. What is constant activity other than fallen acceptance? The pure and carefree mind which accompanies defeat accepts all things but is stained by none of them. An image resembling a "mother's" breast? Fertile memories of unknown origin, the ecstasy of being embraced—yet the woman was soon cast off from such a state of being.

Unalleviated weight and fear bore down upon her. The ocean shook and overflowed from within her, as if a large bottle-shaped jar was naturally seated within her own body.

Shaking, the woman ran home and lay down, covering herself in her padded sleeping robe damp from the ocean breeze.

From that day the woman's feelings changed. The reliability, vitality, and hope that she had once sensed in this poor-looking monk who had suddenly changed into this bold man was once again replaced by utter disdain. This irresolute monk had been able to bear her chilliness and superiority, but this new turn in events was truly incomprehensible. The man was lost. Where he had once been speaking to a being pressing its body to the floor in fear of the ocean, it had suddenly acquired strength, replying to him. If her fear was so great, why couldn't she just confide in her husband? But she revealed not the

slightest hint of trust in him, much less any intent to "confide" in him. When he thought he had resigned himself to this situation, suddenly she would go off to the beach, standing while staring listlessly at the fishing boats coming and going from the firth. This always ended in her returning again, pale and distraught.

Gradually the words and behavior of this husband and wife bore indescribable asperity towards one another. Crouching in her room with the shutters closed to block her view of the ocean, the man would suddenly burst in and roughly thrust them open. Thus the succession of days when the woman's tear-soaked sleeves never dried continued to increase. But it was the man who was broken, and when he spoke to her, her eyebrows crossed upwards with a harshly critical expression.

When spring arrived again, the woman secretly fled alone and went to the capital. Was it because she could no longer bear her fear of the sea? Or because of her distaste for her husband? At least it was not because she had grown to fear the man. When she entered the capital she took the tonsure and became a nun. She wrote this story during the moments she had to herself between sutra readings. Towards the end, she recorded the following thoughts:

> The extraordinary fear and dependence I felt towards the man during our journey resulted perhaps from my having, from the first, beheld in him that great inlet sea. I saw the ocean's body in each and every aspect of the man's appearance and actions.

Written by this mind born in antiquity, the woman's story ends here. But an unspoken pact which I infer from my ancestors' lineage makes me want to add a slender explanation, because I could not help but feel that a code was embedded in such images as the ocean's body "previously visible in the man," the turning point in her feelings towards the ocean brought about by her first sight of it, and the emptiness of the man who had lost his role of symbolizing the ocean.

In other words . . .

"When I think deeply about it, I wonder if fear of the ocean is not a metamorphosis of one's longing for it? Longing, petrified after being pressed down and hidden deeply in the soil of the unconscious for ages, at some unknown time transforms into fear. Just as an active child always shut up inside will eventually become timid. But I believe that such fear is not intimate with the crude and rough everyday 'fear.' Violently it shakes people in their vanity, without ever causing real injury. Isn't this like the fear, experienced during a harsh scolding,

that a part of oneself will be nurtured and forced to mature? Does not fear give to people's minds one form of passivity, and grant them the freedom to swiftly and beautifully rise up? Is this not all the work of some mysterious 'power' which drags humanity toward a place which an unfathomable, invisible 'god'—'the very noble'—had intended? This is exactly the same role that longing had performed originally."

"It will be deeply interesting when whomever unties the cords that bind this story discovers such an omen. Because in all probability, the difference between real fear and the temporary appearance of longing will clearly appear."

"What did this woman rely upon that enabled her to endure lying, trembling, face down upon the floor morning through night in fear of the ocean without even once making an entreating gesture towards her husband? Truly, the woman entrusted her entire faith in the very object of her fear, the ocean, clinging to it wholly, like a child hanging from her mother's sleeve. In this can the difference between the two fears be read."

And as further proof of the relation between my family and the ocean. . . .

Part 3, the last

A photograph stands here. A photograph framed in an oval of stiff cardboard. Embossed arabesque and the photographer's shop name written in florid characters decorate the surrounding mat. . . . This photograph is a tender keepsake of my grandmother's aunt.

The photograph is faded like a pressed flower. The slow passage of days and occasions of harsh summer sun can be seen in it. A young wife. A limp ball gown, pink and desirable. A whale-bone corset filling out like a flower basket. (One can also glimpse only slightly the tips of her silver dancing slippers) . . . and yet . . .

Madame's soft feet (through a delicate shoe) hesitatingly tread upon a small Persian rug spread out in the center of a tatami floor. Pressing in upon madame from all sides stood a six-panelled screen painted in the Korin style, a sliding paper door painted with the seven Chinese sages in the bamboo grove and aged furnishings, which having spent eternity in twilight, acquired a gloss like the fierce glare attained only by those who have reached the end of exhaustion.

Of course one could not have wrought such a clear impression of these hazy objects simply by looking at the picture. But because I heard my grandmother, when taking the picture in her hands, describe distinctly the appearance of "this here" and "that over there," even I feel I can remember clearly how the scene actually appeared.

My grandmother told me that until just before the picture was taken, the room had housed the Buddha shelf and our ancestral tablets.

When yet a young girl, madame had peeked out at the ocean through the screen. The ocean filled her heart and was slowly fermented by her youthful emotions. Some years later, her longing for the ocean came to a boil. This longing was something "living," which she herself could not restrain. Her family were members of the imperial house. Even after she was six or seven years old, she had no occasion to gaze upon the ocean. Although she had glimpsed the ocean when she was a small child, at that age she was not yet even standing or walking, so the memory just cloudily glistened like some unknown deep blue gem.

"Where must you go to reach the ocean? Is the ocean far away? How does one travel to the ocean?"

Her elder brother was a supporter of the move to restore the emperor and had encountered some setback about this time, darkening his moods and causing him to waste away with the despair youth easily suffers.

"No matter how far you travel, the ocean does not exist. Even if you went, the ocean might not be there, . . . but you wouldn't understand such things." Her elder brother replied to her with such answers, and then he just gave an empty, lonely laugh, the true meaning of which she could not understand. . . .

When she was a young girl and her entire family moved to Tokyo, they passed along the ocean during their journey. With the sadness of parting the young woman gazed intently upon the setting sun flowing like magma upon the ocean surface and the ocean birds raising sad cries as they wheeled upwards.

From that time onward the young woman began gradually to lose her feeling of fulfillment in seeing the ocean. She felt she could somehow vaguely understand those mysterious words uttered by her elder brother now dead, just as one can first smell the fragrance borne on a gentle wind blowing past one's ears only after it has wafted through the distant clumps of grasses. Longing must change its clothes like a snake. Only then could she rid herself of this heavy, disease-like longing and become still within something pure and gentle as water. But never did she lose her feeling of joy when she looked at the ocean.

As when a snake completes its change of garments, her desire for the ocean had transformed into something even further distant. A clearer, more active longing awaited the shucking of this soft temporary skin. The strange bright shadow of an island floated up in the

distant ocean where dwelled a person dressed in colors like a preening pigeon. The sun's rays trickled down irritatingly like rain of sulfuric acid. Peacocks and parrots ranged and flew about . . . a secret religion, a kingdom where unknown ceremonies flourished . . . she embraced such visions in her breast. To reach a tropical region, one must first go to the ocean. Thus her longing for the ocean remained intact. . . .

Because her father had for a time been involved with the diplomatic corps, it had not been unusual for Westerners to visit her home. They came wearing clothes of white linen, carrying their sun helmets. Without knowing why, she beheld such strangers and the impressive "coconuts" and picture books of southern countries with descriptions written in English that they brought as gifts with a look of nostalgia . . . she would often gaze at them with an expression as when one sees the scenery of one's home village . . . or when one stares upon one's inner self. . . . But of course this feeling of intimacy was not directed toward the person himself. The emotion was nothing more than her memory of the fondness for the mood created by the person's clothing or gifts . . . which reigned over the "person" or things he had brought and like a halo encircled them, slowly forcing everything in the room to resemble them, with a medicinal effect. . . . In the evening when the summer sun richly drips watery light, she would lose herself in tropical fantasies. (The evening sun pours in. From a single window it shines through a lace curtain, filters through a multitude of the trees' whispering leaves and turns into small circles like the myriad thin lenses one on top of the other one sees when crying—intricate and countless like bubbles of spray; the linen cover of an armchair, or cushion of a northern European-style, the cool stones of the mantelpiece, are all chaotically soaked in the capricious evening sun. Like the flickering of a blaze, in an instant it illuminates the room and then dies down again. . . .)

Thus, slowly, her intensified longing also made her stronger. This much had hateful summer awaited her. Why, you may ask? Because her longing for the ocean and the tropics emerged like ripe fruit, mainly on summer mornings, but also during that rich period like mellow wine just before the glow of sunset. She was submerged in longing. Perhaps that truly was selflessness' strength. No matter what the situation, selflessness always retreats from the other, in other words, never stops from pressing forward and wiping out the existence of the "self" within this ubiquitous "other." When one abolishes the self, this bewitching and gallant life, conversely, violently boils up.

Because the custom of "summering" had not yet taken hold in Japan, years passed where all summer she never saw the ocean. Madame felt empty at heart without realizing in the least that the reason she

could not feel satisfied with her husband was because the object of her own longing, "summer," did not exist in him. . . .

It was on one summer day that this gay picture was taken. Thunder and rain at dusk. With a sound like a roof tile suddenly shattered by a hurled rock, lightning coursed rapidly through the sky. Only after the rock struck did the shattering sound reverberate into the spacious parlor in madame's home. The husband settled down and waited for madame in their entirely Western-style parlor. She opened the rococo door and costumed as already described, entered.

"The photographer will be right here. You want the picture taken in this room, right?"

"Oh, I don't know." Madame's eyes revealed a hint of mischievousness. There was something rather inappropriate in madame's sunny expression as she faced her husband, who, pale and gaunt, appeared like someone dead. She seemed to have nothing on her mind, fluttering a fan of pink silk back and forth in her right hand. The maid knocked upon the door just as her husband asked ". . . in which room?" The fat photographer entered with the maid. The thunder seemed to have quieted a bit. The photographer slightly exaggerated his praise of madame's dress, but even so brimmed over with words of unconcealable captivation. The husband said that because this dress had after a great deal of trouble just been finished today, he wanted her photographed in it before it was ruined at a party the next evening. Anxiety flickered like embers while he talked.

The husband wanted to ask something more. He tried to open his mouth. His youthful wife's voice interrupted. Her voice overflowed in a ripple of pale orange. . . .

"This room will not do. Don't you agree? What about the other room—let's go to the room with the Buddha shelf!"

To the husband's weakened spirit, these words sounded like the pronouncement of his defeat. Something in madame's words forced him either to assent or decline. Like a sleep walker, the husband stands up. The photographer is dumbstruck. That room. The maid hurriedly sets to work. The camera is set up to the side of the Buddha stand. A bright lamp is lit. . . .

The husband shudders. This room had been "his" room. When he emerged from it, he gradually weakened. He had to return to it. Ah, but he could not. He and the room, which had repulsed each other in the past, were now locked in an even struggle. After he left the room, the room's "resistance" won. But it was a small salvation that what had been defeated was empty. Emptiness even sustained him. But now this had been filled. Moreover this occurred through an incongruously

absolute and exquisite fate. As if it were a flower heaving a sigh, the entire room faces him, throwing at him a gorgeous denial. The room shimmers with light. But eventually this symbolizes the room's mighty extinction, symbolizes the husband's own extinction.

Behind this beautiful denial, this glorious fate, the husband saw the gloom in this misery stricken room. He covered his face with both hands. The room shone as if a miracle had occurred, causing the young wife to rise up in its center like a garland of flowers.

The count died six days after the day the picture was taken. Without shedding a tear the wife sat motionless beside the corpse's pillow before the multitude of guests who had come in mourning. After the people had left, madame suddenly threw herself face down and wept, crying out loud. The long period of mourning slowly and gently passed like a season in which only black lilies blossomed.

Soon after the mourning period had ended, she accepted a proposal from a wealthy merchant, and they held their wedding banquet. Her new husband was of humble birth. After the initial shock when she learned that he conducted his business in the South Seas and did not maintain a house on the mainland, people began to see signs of her recovery. That the seed of her own longing lay also within her companion was not only madame's greatest hope, but also most important reason that her love took effect. Stirring the burning coals of her longing, now began to possess a meaning far greater than ever before. Since her husband's death had elevated her to a place of resignation, she could not help but think that it was not desire which stirred these glowing embers but rather karma and fate. Thus when her new husband himself wanted to take up residence in Tokyo, madame urged rather that they once again go to the south.

Like a person suddenly fainting after his nerves were stretched taught, the ribbons broke listlessly as the ship parted from the wharf. Resembling countless dabs of paint, the myriad colors of those who had come to see the passengers off gradually dissolved into one lonely color as they grew further in the distance. That mixture of sadness and joy disappeared like something that would never be found again. "Let's go into the cabin," the new husband said. Madame walked slowly as her tears rose up. Then, without knowing why, she suddenly imagined the appearance of her own figure from behind. The husband saw his wife suddenly stagger under the pathos of this image.

Day upon day on an island where she could seek no pleasure other than the life in her own home. Whenever a ship arrived from Tokyo, various articles they had ordered were delivered to the mansion. Things the husband had ordered were also constantly being sent from

America. Because these two fashions had been deftly melded within her, the Americans who occasionally visited mistook her for a vision of a "Queen of China," . . . although during these years madame's mad longing was never fulfilled and the longing itself ended up in a vastly distant place, her absolute disappointment and the unraveling at the seams of her hope did not appear to have yet dropped the curtain over her life. This was because madame herself had firmly rejected the idea of returning to the capital.

But having come to this land, her life's fountain went dry, and fewer were the occasions when the nightingale of her longing sang. Her quiet decay into a quiet "Japanese woman" was carved over the image of a listless "Island woman." Without the slightest incongruity . . .

Her old friend, having traveled for some time in the southern countries, visited her once. A passage from her journal published after she returned reads as follows:

The Countess (I can still only imagine madame when calling her by her former title) said something like this to me.

"Despite these circumstances, it feels so good to be able to look out at the ocean. If I were to tell you my day's pleasure, ah yes, it must be watching the evening sun sink over the grove of coconut palms."

Moreover, when she said this to me, the Countess' face displayed not a shadow of loneliness nor weariness. Rather I thought there appeared something resplendent and unchanged from the past.

In a dim room of pure white, with the sun itself reclining in the rattan chair, she passed the time knitting, reading, feeding small exotic animals from the tropics, and occasionally offering me a glass of cognac. At mealtimes, her husband, the count, would also come out. During my long journey through the south, this was the sole time I encountered such excellent cooking. . . .

Soon thereafter, madame separated from this husband and returned to Japan. She built a house in pure Japanese style on a large piece of land in the country, where she lived up to her death. She continued that solitary, nunlike existence for almost forty years. Suddenly transformed from her past years as a dabbling collector, madame's purity was admired as a mirror for the widows of her generation. Because society knew nothing about her divorce from the cruel tropics—that she had dared to remain there of her own accord—they looked upon her with expressions of sympathy, extending her the slightly dishonorable goodwill given to a woman thought to have been

deceived. And to those who visited her in her mountain villa she told stories about her burning longing for the ocean during her youth in a way that was neither memory nor complaint. . . .

Walking on a path through a sad and lonely forest of mixed trees, the black lintelled gate was already visible from the dangerously steep, mossy hillside. Above an elegant fence made of old ship timbers, the leafy cherries and oak were layered in dark green. The aged madame always met guests in a room deep inside the house. There one could faintly hear the rainlike murmuring of the cicadas, lulling one into semi-unconsciousness, and the trees' shadows whispering like rustling calico throughout the garden beautifully arranged with stones.

"Would you mind telling me again about the ocean? It was to ask you about this that I've troubled you by calling here. . . ."

"Its no bother—where was I? Ah, that delightful and happy mood. . . . Does any of it still appear to remain within me?"

Thus answering, she merely raised the corners of her lips in a smile. Then, unexpectedly, she invited me "to see the rest of the garden, . . . although there's nothing particularly special about it."

Anyone, I'm afraid, could not help but be amazed at the sureness and springiness of old madame's feet walking before him as she guided him through the garden. After the bamboo grove one passed through a summer pavilion. After reaching the rear of the garden, she stood upon a hillock and knitting her fingers behind her back, stared out silently.

Live oak and elm flourished on the hilltop, the autumn leaves surrounding us were tinged with color as if they had drunk some precious fluid. Above the fallen leaves piled at our feet more leaves fluttered down spreading in layers over them.

One could see in a glance the streets and buildings of the old town stretched out below. Beyond the town stood the sparse silhouettes of the pine forest, and then the ocean, quietly glistening like an overflowing goblet. White sails gently drifted away like floating blossoms of medowsweet.

The aged madame stood resolute. Her white hair fluttered slightly in the breeze, encircling her face in a gentle silver frame. Fixedly silent . . . she was crying, . . . or praying—even that the visitor could not tell. . . .

The visitor glanced back and saw the branches and leaves in the heights of a live oak swaying and rustling in the wind suddenly part to reveal a dazzling pure white sky. For some reason an irritating anxiety crowded his breast. Perhaps the visitor sensed that he stood

beside "death," beside a tranquility like the stillness of a spinning top just before it falls—a tranquility like death.

NOTES

1. In 1946 Mishima brought this work and other stories to Chikuma Shobō's editor, Nakamura Mitsuo, who rejected the works and reportedly exhorted Mishima to abandon writing as a career.
2. Mishima Yukio, "'Hanazakari no mori' no kōro," *Ueno* (January 1968) in Mishima Yukio, *Mishima Yukio ayōron zenshū* (Tokyo: Shinchō-sha, 1989), 478–80.
3. Mishima Yukio, postscript to "Hanazakuri no mori," in *Mishima Yukio tanpen zenshū* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1971), 1:239–40.
4. A *Kokinwakashū*-era poetic convention comparing the passion of love to being burned from the inside out. See Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 206.

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